Quality standards for agricultural products

306. SHRI SHARAD ANANTRAO JOSHI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the countries signatory to the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Agriculture have prescribed specific quality and sanitary/phyto sanitary standards for different agricultural produce they import;

(b) if so, whether these standards are uniform and identical for all the countries of origin;

(c) what are the standards for the commodities exported by India;

(d) what are the facilities, like testing laboratories, available to farmers in the country;

(e) whether Government propose to extend and improve these testing facilities; and

(f) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) and (b) Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) have undertaken to subscribe to the Agreement establishing the WTO along with other annexed multilateral Agreements, including the Agreement on Agriculture and the Agreement on Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Measures (SPS), in the form of a 'single undertaking'. As per the SPS Agreement, Member countries are expected to harmonize their standards with international standards (Codex Alimentarius Commission for human health, International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) for plant health and International Office of Epizootics (OIE) for animal health). The SPS Agreement, however, provides that in case more stringent standards are applied by any country, these have to be based on scientific principles and risk analysis. Members shall ensure that their sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures do not arbitrarily or unjustifiably

discriminate between members were identical or similar conditions prevail, including between their own territory and that of other members. Sanitary and phytosanitary measures shall not be applied in a manner which would constitute a disguised restriction on international trade.

(c) Under the Export (Quality Control & Inspection) Act, 1963, at present there are 6 product groups that are covered under compulsory export quality control and inspection. These products include fish and fishery products, dairy products, egg products, poultry products, meat products and honey. Notifications have been brought out subjecting these products to mandatory quality control and inspection prior to export. The standards applicable have been generally laid down which *inter alia* include: (i) National standards of importing country, (ii) Contractual specifications agreed to between the foreign buyer and the exporters provided that the same satisfies the health and other requirements of the importing country and (iii) in the absence of these two, the minimum specifications laid down in the notifications. The standards broadly cover the physical and chemical parameters as well as residues for pesticides, veterinary drugs, heavy metals etc. which are specified in the notifications.

(d) In order to improve the testing facilities, the Government of India have already set up/strengthened a Central Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (Izatnagar, Bareilly) and four Regional Disease Diagnostic Laboratories (Jallandhar, Pune, Bangalore and Kolkata). Ultra-modern Plant Quarantine Laboratory facilities are established at the five (5) major Plant Quarantine Stations (Amritsar, Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai and New Delhi) for undertaking Quarantine inspection and testing of agricultural commodities either imported into or exported out of the country.

(e) and (f) Yes, improvement of the testing laboratories and related facilities is a constant endeavour of the Government. It has been proposed, under the Tenth Plan, to strengthen further Quarantine laboratory facilities for inspection of agricultural commodities at the other major/minor ports.